



# NORTHERN IRELAND

## INTRODUCTION

For the past eighteen months the National Executive Committee has given serious consideration to Northern Ireland. A study group set up early last year has examined in great detail every aspect of this vitally important issue. It has taken evidence from constituency parties and affiliated organisations in Great Britain and from interested groups and individuals in Northern Ireland. It has also held discussions with a wide variety of organisations, including the trade unions, in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. In all its deliberations the study group was very conscious of its responsibility to formulate a clear, credible, socialist policy on Northern Ireland.

The current conflict, which began with marches for civil rights in 1968 and developed, after 1970, into armed opposition to Northern Ireland's constitutional status, has so far taken over 2,000 lives, with many thousands more injured. It is seen by Sinn Fein and other nationalist organisations as an extension of the aspirations legitimately expressed in 1918 and denied by partition, and by the Provisional IRA as a continuation of the violent struggles of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It is viewed by the Unionist Parties, the protestant paramilitary organisations and practically the whole Protestant community as an attack on their democratically expressed right to remain within the United Kingdom. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the situation, it is clear that the stage has now been reached where a new initiative, which establishes acceptable political institutions and ends the violence, is urgently needed.

## 1 THE CONSTITUTION

The National Executive Committee has considered a number of possible **constitutional structures** for Northern Ireland. These have included:

- (i) continuing with direct rule;
- (ii) establishing a devolved power-sharing government;
- (iii) negotiating the establishment of a united Ireland;
- (iv) restoring majority rule government;
- (v) an independent Northern Ireland;
- (vi) a confederation of the British Isles.

All these options have their supporters. For example, the Social Democratic and Labour Party in Northern Ireland has consistently campaigned for devolved power-sharing government — although it now believes that this is no longer possible within the context of present British policy; Fine Gael and Sinn Fein have produced detailed programmes for a form of Irish unity; the Unionist Parties have insisted on majority rule devolved government; and the New Ulster Political Research Group (a political body which was connected with the Ulster Defence Association) also prepared proposals for an independent Northern Ireland. We do not, however, regard these options as mutually exclusive: it would clearly be possible to establish one set of arrangements (say, power-sharing), whilst working towards another (say, a united Ireland).

Of the half dozen or so constitutional options we examined, we initially rejected three and looked at a further three in considerably greater depth. The three options we initially rejected were: majority rule devolved government; an independent Northern Ireland; and a confederation of the British Isles. On the basis of the discussions held in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and the evidence submitted to the study group, it was clear that none of these options would be politically workable or acceptable. Nevertheless, we did give each of them serious attention.

### **Majority rule devolved government**

The Northern Ireland Parliament set up in 1921 was beset with problems from the very beginning. It had been set up much against the wishes of the people living in what was then six of the nine counties of Ulster — three were incorporated into the Free State — and it was boycotted by Nationalist and Sinn Fein leaders elected to it in 1921. It came under attack from the IRA — but this was matched by protestant violence, resulting in the deaths of more catholics than protestants. Meanwhile the British Government remained indifferent. Faced with all this, Unionist politicians resolved to consolidate their authority and power.

Local government and Parliamentary boundaries were gerrymandered, proportional representation abolished, and electoral boundaries redrawn in places like Londonderry (many nationalist-controlled councils had refused to recognise the authority of the new government, giving their allegiance to the new Free State in the south). In addition a number of Unionist-controlled local authorities discriminated against catholics in housing and employment, and many firms followed the advice of Sir Basil Brooke (later Lord Brookeborough) to employ 'good protestant lads and lasses'. The effect of all this was to further alienate the minority community from the institutions of government and create an atmosphere of mutual distrust and suspicion. Majority rule came to an end with the prorogation of the

Stormont Parliament in 1972 and the introduction of direct rule from Westminster.

Some Unionist politicians and, if opinion polls are to be believed, a majority of the Unionist community, would like to see the return of a majority devolved government in Northern Ireland. But non-Unionist leaders, the pro-union Alliance Party and a majority of the catholic community are vigorously opposed to this. It is extremely unlikely, therefore, that given the past experience of majority devolved government and the current opposition to it within the minority community, it could be made to work. It would not, in our view, provide the representatives of the minority community with any real opportunity to participate in the government of the state. Nor would there be any guarantee that discrimination would not re-occur on a substantial scale. The success of devolved government depends upon it receiving the confidence and support of a substantial cross-section of both communities. That is obviously not present in Northern Ireland and for that reason we must reject it.

### **Negotiated independence**

The major premise of the advocates of independence is that the people of Ulster are culturally and ethnically different, both from their fellow citizens in the rest of the United Kingdom, and from their neighbours in the Republic of Ireland. It is believed that, given the opportunity, this common identity would assert itself in an independent Northern Ireland. All that is necessary for this to happen, is a willingness by both communities in Northern Ireland to give up their traditional national allegiances and sink their 'differences' in a new, independent state.

Opinion in Northern Ireland on this has yet to be properly tested, but polls show there is very little support for independence. This may not always be the case of course, but our policy has to take account of current reality rather than future uncertainty. Our objections to independence, however, are political and economic. What we have said about majority devolved government doubly applies to independence. It can at least be said of majority devolved government within the United Kingdom, that the Westminster Parliament would have ultimate authority over it, and could, if necessary, step in to protect minority interests. This cannot be said about an independent Northern Ireland state. However well-meaning the intentions of its advocates, no ultimate guarantee of the protection of minority rights would, **in practice**, exist. It is claimed that an independent state would have a guarantor of such rights, that is, a Bill of Rights incorporated into the constitution. But experience shows us that even where such constitutions do exist, as for example in the Soviet Union and in the USA, protection from discrimination cannot be absolutely guaranteed.

Economically it would be very difficult for an independent state to survive without substantial outside help. The traditional Ulster industries of linen and shipbuilding have declined dramatically over the past two decades or so, and few labour-intensive industries have been established. Northern Ireland is totally lacking in indigenous energy sources, with the exception of potential gas reserves in the west, but it is believed that even these will not be sufficient to prevent imports on a substantial scale. The current subvention to Northern Ireland from central government is in the region of £1400 million (excluding security costs), and it is difficult to imagine the social services, for example, being maintained even at existing levels by an independent government. Indeed the supporters of independence envisage external assistance (including that from Great Britain), over a period of time — perhaps twenty to twenty-five years. It is inconceivable that public opinion in Britain would allow a Westminster government to heavily support an independent state for that length of time. Yet even if Britain did offer support, this may not be long lasting. A future government seeking to cut public expenditure, could withdraw it. In this event, those who would suffer most would be the ordinary working class people. For these reasons, therefore, we have no alternative but to oppose the concept of an independent Northern Ireland.

## Confederation of the British Isles

The idea of a confederation of the British Isles has not, to the best of our knowledge, been seriously considered by any major political organisation in Great Britain or Ireland. It is not something, obviously, which will find much favour in the majority community. It is certainly not a political structure which would find immediate favour with either Nationalists or Unionists in Northern Ireland or with the political parties in the Republic. Nevertheless, we felt that we ought to give it some consideration as it is an alternative with interesting aspects to it. Upon close examination, however, we concluded that it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible to achieve.

In theory, the idea that each constituent part of a new political arrangement of the British Isles should be given a substantial degree of autonomy is an attractive one. Legislative powers would be devolved to parliaments in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, or, to Ireland as a single nation within the British Isles. This latter step would be similar to the intentions of the original Third Home Rule Bill and would, therefore, require the Republic of Ireland giving up its status as an independent, sovereign nation. Even if sovereign parliaments were established in Britain and Ireland, we believe this would be unacceptable to the great majority of Irish people.

It would also, in our opinion, be opposed by extreme nationalist and republican organisations, such as the Provisional IRA. It would be

argued by those groups that to agree to confederation would be to give up the struggle for a free and independent Irish Republic, that even with a considerable degree of autonomy Ireland, would effectively be brought back into the bosom of British rule. Furthermore, Great Britain, with a population of 54 million, to the Republic of Ireland's 3¼ million, would dominate the confederation. The Provisional IRA would, in these circumstances, step up their campaign against British involvement in Ireland. We do not believe, therefore, that confederation is likely to bring peace and reconciliation to Ireland, and we must reject it as a possible constitutional alternative.

## THE WAY FORWARD

The proposals we put forward below are based on a desire to see peace and reconciliation **initially**, between the two communities in Northern Ireland, and, **ultimately**, to achieve reconciliation between the two parts of Ireland. We regard them as being an important part of the programme for the next Labour Government. We have no illusions that they would be implemented overnight: but we would hope that a Labour Government would take them seriously and begin to adopt them at the earliest opportunity.

Three constitutional structures were considered: direct rule from Westminster, power-sharing devolved government, and the unification of Ireland. After examination, we concluded that these should not be seen as separate alternatives. Instead, they should be seen as an integral part of a practical political programme, with the one set of arrangements giving way, as soon as possible, to another.

At the heart of this programme is a long and deeply-held belief in the Labour Party that Ireland should, by peaceful means, and on the basis of consent, be united and the recognition that this will be achieved with the introduction of socialist policies. Of the 17 Constituency Labour Parties and 51 party branches who submitted evidence to the study group, 50 per cent were in favour of unification. In addition there was a clear majority on the study group in favour of a united Ireland. At the same time, however, we accept that when a Labour Government first takes office, it will be necessary to continue for a time with direct rule, — possibly, in the interim period, seeking the establishment, by agreement, of a devolved partnership administration. This in turn, we hope, would provide the basis for progress towards unification.

## Unification — our objective

The view in the Labour Party that our policy should be based on the objective of unity between the two parts of Ireland goes back to at least

1918, when Conference adopted a resolution recognising 'the claim of the people of Ireland to Home Rule, and to self-determination in all exclusively Irish affairs'. It also has substantial support amongst the minority community in Northern Ireland and within the Republic of Ireland. Those who advocate this course argue that the general election of 1918 — in which Sinn Fein, with just under 48 per cent of the vote, won 70 seats in the 26 counties, and three seats in the six counties, out of a total of 105 — showed massive support for Irish independence. Consequently, it is argued, partition was imposed on Ireland against the expressed wish of the vast majority of the Irish people.

We believe the attainment of Irish unity, with the introduction of socialist policies, will bring benefits to the people of both Northern Ireland and the Republic. On this basis, it will enhance the prospects of working class unity throughout Ireland by harmonising and integrating economic and social interests, and bringing the labour and political movements together on a national basis. It will also encourage the Provisional IRA to cease its activities and seek, through its political arm Sinn Fein, the support of the people through the ballot box.

Against this view, however, it is argued by the majority in the North, that Ireland was never 'one country': that the predominately protestant North-East developed separately from the Irish nation in the rest of the country, and that consequently, it is just as entitled to self-determination. This separate development has resulted in a deep-seated opposition to a united Ireland within the protestant community which goes back many years. Even before partition Ulster protestants had opposed all attempts by British governments to introduce a measure of Irish Home Rule and were prepared to use force to show the strength of their opposition.

This opposition to Irish unity, which has a solid protestant working class base, has been consistently expressed in electoral support for pro-union political parties in favour of staying within the UK over the past 60 years. The local government elections held earlier this year, confirmed this position. The first preference share of the vote going to pro-union parties, even excluding the various independent pro-union candidates, was some 67 per cent. Similarly, in their evidence to the study group, trade unions and trades councils alike in Northern Ireland counselled extreme caution on the possibility of the Labour Party coming forward with proposals for unification. It could, they argued, undermine working class unity and make it more difficult for them to limit the impact of sectarianism on the shop floor: and it would be misrepresented by Unionist politicians as a policy of expulsion, and be used by them to entrench their own sectarian political position.

We respect the strongly held views of the majority community in Northern Ireland. But our proposals for progress towards a united Ireland must be seen as a contribution to a continuing **democratic**

political process — for we certainly do not believe that partition can be ended by threats, coercion or force. Our aim is to help bring about the unification of Ireland by agreement and consent between the two parts of Ireland: and we agree with our trade union colleagues in the North that a prerequisite of this consent is the creation of greater unity between and within the working class in Northern Ireland. We also accept that, if the majority community in Northern Ireland is to be reconciled to the creation of a united Ireland, then discussions should proceed between the British Government, the Irish Government and the two communities in Northern Ireland.

It is not our intention in this statement to lay down a step-by-step plan or timetable for the next Labour Government for the achievement of unification by consent. Neither do we seek to provide a detailed blueprint for the constitutional arrangements which will be needed to underpin a united Ireland. For the substance of this can emerge, we believe, only after a long and arduous process of discussion and negotiation, involving the governments, the parties and the peoples of the Republic, of Great Britain and of Northern Ireland.

One observation we do make, however, concerns the nature and standing of the so-called 'guarantee'. The present position with respect to Northern Ireland's constitutional status, under the 1973 Northern Ireland Constitution Act, is that there will be no change without the consent of the majority of its people. Labour's position, as set out in Labour's Programme 1976, is that the party 'respects and supports the right of the Northern Ireland people to remain within the UK'. Nevertheless, we do not intend to allow this to halt progress towards a political settlement in Northern Ireland. The guarantee, as understood by the party, is that the people of Northern Ireland will not be expelled from the United Kingdom against their wishes. It must not mean a veto on political development in the hands of Unionist leaders. We intend, therefore, to begin our political discussions with all the interested parties, even if there is outright hostility from these Unionist leaders. At the same time, however, we must stress that, at the end of the day, it would be no part of the political programme of the Labour Party to force Northern Ireland out of the United Kingdom or into the Republic of Ireland. Before any constitutional change is made, therefore, we would seek to obtain the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. Labour will campaign actively to win that consent, for peaceful unification.

## **Agreement within Northern Ireland**

Our medium-term goal would be to reach an understanding with the political leaders in Northern Ireland on the need for closer political co-operation between the parties. It is essential that if the people of Northern Ireland are to live together — as we would hope, in an ultimately united Ireland — they should begin to share responsibility for

governing the state in which they presently live. If this understanding could be reached, it would have positive effects on the political climate in Northern Ireland. The recent hunger strikes, which were an important element of the Provisional IRA's campaign of violence, undoubtedly polarised political attitudes. It is, however, in the long-term interests of the people of both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland that a bridge be built between the two communities in Northern Ireland. Agreement between the political parties in Northern Ireland to share responsibility within a new government would be a solid base on which to build the bridge.

A crucially important effect of political agreement between the parties in Northern Ireland would be to attract the support of the minority community for the institutions of the state and ensure its involvement in constitutional politics. It would also provide a forum for local politicians and fill what many regard as a power vacuum in Northern Ireland politics. The short-lived 1974 power-sharing experiment achieved a measure of success in these respects and there is no reason to believe that a similar exercise, providing it had the goodwill and support of the people, could not at least emulate that. We would not wish to lay down hard and fast rules as to the structure and composition of a devolved government in Northern Ireland. It would be better if consultations were held with the political parties to find common agreement in these areas, and that is what we would expect a Labour Government to do.

Unfortunately, there has been very little movement in recent years towards establishing a power-sharing government in Northern Ireland. Unionist leaders have not been prepared to come to any formal arrangement with their counterparts in the minority community. This is largely based on their experience of power-sharing in 1974 and the events since then, which have tended to further polarise political attitudes. Moreover, it is also felt by many in Northern Ireland that power-sharing helps to institutionalise sectarianism, making it even more difficult for class politics to emerge. Unionists claim that it simply transfers the power of veto from the majority to the minority. Our discussions will, of course, have to take these factors into account if any progress is to be made.

Our aim would be to build on the success of power-sharing to bring about a united Ireland by agreement and consent. In this light we would seek to establish other institutions, which would bring closer co-operation and understanding between the two parts of Ireland. Co-operation already exists to a degree in a number of social and economic areas: but it would be our intention to develop them further, especially in the field of economic and industrial policy. Similarly in the important field of security, we would also be seeking to maintain and improve co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Republic. In time, we believe that all areas of mutual interest should be properly institutionalised to strengthen the links between North and South. For

even in the absence of agreement on political unity, the needs of the people will be better served where there is closer co-operation and understanding.

## Direct Rule — the short term necessity

It is inevitable that direct rule from Westminster will have to continue for the time being. When it was introduced in March 1972 it was never intended that it would be a permanent system and indeed, successive Labour and Conservative governments have made a number of unsuccessful attempts to bring it to an end by establishing devolved government in Northern Ireland. We recognise, however, that it may be some time before agreement is reached on a new form of government within Northern Ireland and that Westminster will therefore, bear the full responsibility for governing.

In the present climate this may be no bad thing. Opinion polls have tended to show that direct rule is regarded by a clear majority in both communities as the most preferable political option after their respective first choices. This is not altogether surprising. Under direct rule both Labour and Conservative governments have generally acted to defend the rights of all sections of the community in Northern Ireland. Anti-discrimination legislation such as the Fair Employment Act 1976 has helped to protect working people (although as we note elsewhere, there is a case for giving the Act more teeth to deal with recalcitrant employers); sex discrimination has been outlawed; the law on rape has been brought into line with that in Britain, and divorce laws are now similar to those in the rest of the UK. However, in spite of the progress that has been made with direct rule in the area of civil rights, the Northern Ireland governmental **structure** is unsatisfactory. In our view there is a need for changes, to make it more accountable and democratic — changes which will, in themselves, help to underpin the development of a devolved power-sharing administration.

## Reform of local government

The structure of local government in Northern Ireland is not without its problems. According to a number of organisations in Northern Ireland, but particularly the trade unions, the major problem is the political gap which exists between the district council level and Westminster. Many of the complaints we heard, concerned the almost total absence of democratic accountability of government ministers, administrators and area board members, to the people of Northern Ireland.

There are a number of changes that could be made to improve the present system of direct rule. The most immediate changes concern civil rights. The next Labour Government should, in our opinion, ensure that

the people of Northern Ireland have the same rights that exist in Britain. We are thinking, for example, of abortion and homosexual rights, but we would wish other rights to be included, relating to peaceful picketing and unfair dismissals in trade union and employment matters. We also believe that existing legislation, such as the Payment of Debt Act, which discriminates against working people, should be repealed. We do not accept that there ought to be second class citizens anywhere in the United Kingdom.

In addition changes could be made in the **structure** of direct rule. At present there are 26 district councils responsible for the most minor services of local government including recreation, refuse collection and street lighting. These councils are elected by, and accountable to, the people. All the **major** services, such as education, planning and social services are controlled by, in the main, unelected Area Boards. Since 1971, housing has been the responsibility of a central executive, separate from the rest of local government, none of whose members are directly elected.

Some of the changes we propose were called for by the trade unions in Northern Ireland in their evidence to the study group. Without seeking to abolish the Area Boards we suggest that these could be made more accountable and responsive to local needs through greater elected representation. Each Area Board could, for example, be made up of one third government appointees, one third district councillors, (councillors elected from the membership of councils within the area), and one third trade unionists elected to the Boards through their own trade union machinery. This would ensure that the Boards were made up of a majority of elected members — unlike the current position. Housing, which is the responsibility of a non-elected central executive, is more difficult: the advice of the trade unions in Northern Ireland was that control of housing should best be left in the hands of the Housing Executive. Given the difficulties in the past with housing we concur with this view.

To go beyond these reforms poses problems. It has been suggested that, in the absence of power-sharing devolved government, the best way to fill the political gap would be to transfer all the major local government services to an elected regional authority, similar to Strathclyde. This would, it is argued, bring local government in Northern Ireland in line with that in Great Britain. Alternatively, the Area Boards themselves could become wholly elected institutions, if it was felt that more than one body should be responsible for major services.

However, there is considerable opposition among political leaders of the minority community to any substantial changes in the structure of local government. The experience of local government during the period of the Stormont Parliament leads many Catholics to believe that a

repetition of discrimination on a wide scale could occur if real powers over major services are restored to elected councillors. It is argued that some Unionist-controlled district councils practice discrimination, even in the relatively minor areas they currently control — and that, given the opportunity, this would be repeated in the major areas of local government. We would not favour, therefore, any major changes to local government without further consideration and consultation with those concerned. In the absence of a power-sharing devolved government, it would not be wise to go beyond the limited reforms, including wider trade union representation, suggested above.

## Conclusion

Our basic position with regard to the relationship between Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland can therefore be stated simply: we wish to see unity between the two parts of Ireland, based on agreement and consent. In our view this will only be achieved by a process of negotiation between the governments of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland with the support of the people in both the North and South of Ireland. But an essential step on the road to unity, will be the bringing together of the two communities in Northern Ireland, and the development of greater working class unity in the North. We would, therefore, expect the next Labour Government to begin negotiations with the political parties in Northern Ireland at an early stage, to find a way of moving forward to a democratic political settlement — and also to introduce the kind of radical socialist policies on jobs, industry and the economy, which could provide the basis for new hope and unity within the working class in the North.

## 2 EMERGENCY LEGISLATION, SECURITY AND CIVIL RIGHTS

In statistical terms there has been a marked improvement in the security situation in recent years. Fewer people were killed in 1980, for example, than in any year since 1970. But the success or otherwise of any security operation cannot simply be measured in terms of the number of deaths, as if people were mere statistics. We have to judge it by other criteria; for example, whether it is winning the support of a broad section of the community, whether it is breaking the morale of the terrorists and whether it is assisting movement towards a political settlement. On these scores we have to admit that, to date, security policy has **not** been particularly successful.

It may be argued that to consider security measures solely within a political context is to misunderstand their objective; that the purpose of measures such as the Northern Ireland Emergency Provisions Act 1978

and the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Acts 1974 and 1976, is to contain terrorism to a manageable level, and not to defeat it. There is, of course, a certain amount of truth in this, for the army itself has acknowledged that there cannot be a purely military solution. Even allowing for this, it is becoming increasingly doubtful whether the emergency measures, as presently enacted, are helping the overall situation, and it is with this that we must be concerned.

An integral part of the overall situation is the question of political status. In our opinion it cannot be viewed in isolation, as if it were simply concerned with conditions in Northern Ireland prisons. Nor for that matter can the no-jury Diplock Courts be regarded as a purely legal question unconnected with the wider political issues. Political status and the Diplock Courts, with which it is linked, must be seen as an important part of the political problem. In considering all these questions we were very conscious of the connection between security policy and politics, and our observations are, as far as possible, based on this.

### **The Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978**

This Act, which was first introduced in 1973, applies to Northern Ireland only. It is the main piece of legislation governing the activities of the security forces in Northern Ireland. Part I of the Act, which deals with scheduled offences, i.e. offences related to terrorism, also covers non-jury trials. Part II gives the police and security forces powers of arrest, detention and search without warrant, which, in any normal situation would be described as draconian. Part III covers offences against public security and order and includes provisions for proscribing organisations such as the Provisional IRA, the Ulster Volunteer Force, the Ulster Freedom Fighters and the Red Hand Commandos.

A number of people in Northern Ireland including trade unionists, expressed great concern about the activities and behaviour of some members of the security forces. It was suggested that they often resort to the random use of their powers under the legislation, to harass ordinary citizens not in any way connected with terrorism. Without wishing to add to the allegations levelled against the security forces, who have a difficult job in very trying circumstances, we must insist on the highest standards of behaviour from them. Our aim is to achieve a reasonable balance between the maintenance of law and order and the protection of civil rights.

There is, in our view, a strong case for a fundamental review of the operation of the Act with a view to changing some of its operations and to provide for its ultimate replacement. We therefore recommend that the next Labour Government carries out such a review and legislates accordingly. We are particularly concerned with Part II of the Act as it

relates to powers of arrest, detention and search. It is believed, for example, that deprivation of liberty under section 11 to 14 is not in conformity with the requirements of Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights. We recommend that the review of the Act be given high priority.

### **Prevention of Terrorism Act**

The Prevention of Terrorism Act introduced in November 1974 immediately following the Birmingham pub-bombings and re-introduced as a fresh piece of legislation in 1976, gives the police powers to hold people they reasonably suspect of having committed an offence under the Act for a period of 48 hours and they can, in some cases, apply to the Home Secretary to hold them for a further five days. The Act, which covers the whole of the United Kingdom, also provides for the expulsion of people from Great Britain to Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland, or from Northern Ireland to Great Britain. Parliament has the authority to renew or repeal the Act every twelve months. It was last renewed in March 1981.

A review of the operation of the Act was carried out under Lord Shackleton in 1978. The Shackleton Report, published in August 1978, concluded that:

‘I do not believe that legislation of this kind should have any degree of permanence without a continuing and careful scrutiny of its operation, and its implications for civil liberties. . . . It would be highly regrettable if the view were to gain ground that these powers should in some way slide into part of our permanent legislation. I do not think that they should.’ (Para 159).

‘Subject to these comments, my judgement is that while the threat from terrorism continues, the powers in this Act cannot be dispensed with.’ (Para 160).

The report also made a number of recommendations including quarterly publication of statistics on the operation of the Act, a review of exclusion order cases, with the possibility of the orders being revoked, repeal of section 11, uniform adherence to the Judges Rules and a reconsideration of policy on financial assistance to relatives of excluded persons. Some of the more minor of these recommendations have been carried out.

We are not at all satisfied with the way that the provisions of the Act are carried out. Indeed we are not convinced that the Act itself is in fact, necessary. It involves the infringement of civil liberty. Our concern lies, in particular, with three aspects of the Act. These are related to the powers of arrest and detention, section 11 of the 1976 Act which makes

it an offence not to pass on to the police information concerned with terrorist acts, or persons connected with them, and the powers of exclusion. At the very least, we believe that some of the powers connected with the above should be modified, and the rights of those arrested and detained should be strengthened. We agree with the National Council for Civil Liberties which says, in a recent report, that the provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Act 'violate international standards on human rights'. We cannot accept that such legislation should continue in existence and we would, therefore, repeal this Act.

## Policing and security

In August 1969 troops were sent into Northern Ireland to assist the police with the civil disorder that had broken out in Londonderry and Belfast. Initially, the army was seen by many Catholics as a bulwark against Protestant attacks, and relations between the troops and the minority community were harmonious. However, whatever credibility the troops had, was shattered by the incident in January 1972 known as 'Bloody Sunday', when 15 Catholics were killed following a march — declared illegal by the then Stormont Government — organised by the Derry Civil Rights Association. None of the dead (or wounded) had been shot while handling a firearm or bomb.

In recent years the policy of giving greater authority to the police has been successful in allowing a considerable reduction in the profile of troops in urban areas. The purpose of this policy, is to gradually win acceptance of the police right across the community in Northern Ireland, so as to allow them to carry out those duties which, for some time, have been undertaken by the troops. Eventually it is hoped that troops will only be required for back-up operations in Belfast and Derry and security work along the border.

The number of troops in Northern Ireland has declined over the years. In 1972, at the height of the Provisional IRA offensive when 468 people died, there were over 21,000 troops and 9,000 members of the UDR (excluding RUC and RUC Reserve). By 1976 these figures had fallen to 15,000 and just under 8,000 respectively. Currently there are about 11,000 troops and 7,500 members of the UDR in operation. There has, therefore, been a gradual reduction in the number of troops since the peak of 1972.

There is some support inside the Labour Party for the early withdrawal of troops from Northern Ireland. This was reflected in the evidence received from constituency parties and branches. There is, however, very little enthusiasm for such a move in Northern Ireland itself. Many of the organisations in Northern Ireland met by the study group were critical of the 'troops out' lobby in Britain. The trade unions, in particular, warned of the dangers of a premature withdrawal of the

army and suggested that the policy of gradual withdrawal of the troops from particular areas should be continued.

We believe that the trade unions are right. We are, of course, aware of the accusations levelled at the troops in Northern Ireland, and we utterly condemn any maltreatment of people by the security forces. Anyone found guilty of such behaviour should be swiftly brought to justice. However, we cannot, because of this, support the demands for the immediate withdrawal of the troops or for a withdrawal date to be set. In our view, this would only lead to an escalation of violence. It should be the duty of every government to protect the lives and property of all its citizens and this would not be served by such hasty and ill-prepared action. Until policing and security can be carried out with efficiency and justice by the locally based forces, there will, unfortunately, be a need for continued support by the troops. We would, however, urge all sections of the community to assist the work of the police in Northern Ireland in their struggle to establish law and order. An acceptable police force is a necessary part of a successful security policy.

## Discrimination and Civil Rights

Many human rights provisions and reforms in social law have been introduced in the past ten years or so. Some of these have simply brought laws in Northern Ireland in line with those in England and Wales, but others have been entirely new, relating to discrimination and unequal or unfair treatment. This legislation has included:

- The establishment of a Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (ombudsman) to investigate complaints of **maladministration** (which includes discrimination), against government departments. At the same time (1969) a Commissioner for Complaints was also set up to deal with **grievances against local councils and public bodies**.
- The Prevention of Incitement to Hatred Act (NI) 1970 imposed penalties for **incitement to hatred** and for the circulation of false statements or false reports.
- The Police Act (NI) 1970 set up a **police authority**, representative of all sections of the community, as an independent body.
- From June 1971 all contractors (including sub-contractors), tendering for a Northern Ireland government contract were required to complete an undertaking not to practise **religious discrimination**.
- The Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1973 formally abolished the **death penalty** for murder.

- Part III of the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973 **out-lawed discrimination** practised by central and local government, and statutory bodies in Northern Ireland.
- A Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights was set up under the 1973 Northern Ireland Constitution Act.
- The Fair Employment Act 1976 deals with the promotion of equality of opportunity in **employment** between people of different religious beliefs, and makes it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against a person on religious grounds, in either the public or private sector.
- **The Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976** made it unlawful to discriminate in employment on grounds of sex or marriage or in the provision of goods, facilities and services.
- The Police (NI) Order 1977 provided for the establishment of a **Police Complaints Board** for Northern Ireland, similar to the Board for England and Wales.
- The Sexual Offences (NI) Order 1978 brought the law on **rape** into line with that in England and Wales.
- The Matrimonial Causes (NI) Order 1978 brought the law on **divorce** broadly in line with that in England and Wales.

This is an impressive list of achievements which indicates just what has, and can be done to strengthen civil rights in Northern Ireland. Its relative success was acknowledged by a number of the organisations in Northern Ireland met by the study group. They did suggest, however, that there are areas which require radical reform if discrimination is to be eliminated.

There was a division of opinion, both in the evidence received from the constituency parties and branches, and in the discussions held with organisations in Northern Ireland, as to whether a **Bill of Rights** for Northern Ireland would best provide protection against discrimination and abuses by the civil authorities, or whether this could be achieved by the simple extension of Westminster legislation. Those in favour of a Bill of Rights argued that if it were entrenched, it would make it difficult for abuses of civil rights to occur. It would do so, it is believed, by providing protection under an established written 'Charter of Rights', with in-built guarantees covering every area of civil and human rights. It was argued that a Bill of Rights was particularly essential if Northern Ireland is to have a devolved government at some time in the future. On the other hand, it was argued that the protection of civil rights can best be guaranteed by the Westminster Parliament extending legislation to Northern Ireland, as it has done in the past.

The question of whether or not Northern Ireland should have a Bill of Rights has, of course, already been seriously considered. In 1977 the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights rejected the idea. Instead it proposed that the European Convention on Human Rights should be incorporated into the domestic law of the United Kingdom as a whole. We were aware of this when we considered the whole area of civil rights in Northern Ireland.

We do not believe that civil rights can be enhanced or improved, or discrimination overcome, by the establishment of a separate Bill of Rights. It is not at all clear how such a Bill of Rights could be entrenched, if it is understood that entrenchment means that one Parliament could bind its successor in this respect. This would be contrary to current constitutional practice in the United Kingdom. Moreover, an entrenched Bill of Rights would shift the existing constitutional balance away from the elected and accountable Parliament, and towards the unelected and unaccountable judiciary; it would, in short, place greater powers in the hands of the courts and the judges. We do not believe that this is something which we should encourage.

In our view, the civil rights of the people of Northern Ireland can be best protected by the Westminster Parliament simply extending primary legislation, and acting as the guarantor of such rights. This applies in particular to areas which are not currently provided for in Northern Ireland, such as abortion, homosexual rights and education. At present the law in Northern Ireland relating to abortion is similar to that which existed in England and Wales prior to 1967. It is believed that at least 2,000 women a year travel from Northern Ireland to England to avail themselves of the abortion facilities. The law in Northern Ireland should be brought into line with that in England and Wales. Similarly, the law relating to homosexual acts should be changed so that it conforms with that in England and Wales. In education, Northern Ireland still retains the grammar school system to a substantial degree. We would wish therefore, to move towards a full comprehensive educational system, in line with that which exists practically everywhere else in the UK. Eventually, we would like to see real progress in the direction of an integrated system of education in Northern Ireland.

To strengthen our determination that there should be no differences in the provision of civil rights between Northern Ireland and Great Britain and to bring legislation in the member countries into line we believe that the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights should investigate and highlight the areas where legislation differs. The Commission could then make recommendations for reforms in all these areas.

Our concern is to ensure that for as long as Northern Ireland is a part of the United Kingdom, its people should not be treated unfairly, and that they should be afforded the same rights enjoyed by those elsewhere

in the UK. In our opinion the greater the degree of civil liberties in Northern Ireland, the greater the prospect of the two communities coming together, which is itself an essential prerequisite for unity between the two parts of Ireland.

### **3 H-BLOCKS, POLITICAL STATUS AND THE DIPLOCK COURTS**

#### **Political status**

The present hunger-strikes undertaken by a number of Provisional IRA, INLA and Irish Republican Socialist Party prisoners are designed to win political status for themselves and all other republican prisoners in the Maze Prison in Northern Ireland. In October 1980, a statement issued by a spokesman for the H-Block blanket-men specifically stated that a hunger strike would shortly commence in pursuit of their demand for political status. It was an extension of a campaign which began in 1976, when the then Labour Government, on the recommendation of the Gardiner Report in 1975, ended special category status for all persons convicted of 'scheduled offences' after March 1, 1976. Special category status had been introduced by a Conservative Government in June 1972 after a prolonged hunger strike by prisoners in Crumlin Road prison, Belfast.

In March 1978 this campaign was stepped up when republican prisoners refused to wash or use the toilets, and smashed up the furniture in their cells. Later they smeared their own excrement on the cell walls. In December 1980, seven republican prisoners embarked on a hunger strike, but this was terminated within three weeks because, it was claimed at the time, the Government had agreed to a number of concessions on prison conditions.

The Provisional IRA does not deny that the objective of the hunger strikes is to win political status. However, it sees the issues of prison 'reform' as an essential part of this. Consequently, for the past few months their efforts have been directed towards wringing major concessions governing prison rules. The so-called five demands are, in effect, demands that Provisional IRA, and other republican prisoners should be given special privileges, over and above those which exist for conforming prisoners in Northern Ireland prisons — that they should, in other words, be given special treatment and regarded as special prisoners. Superficially, their case is a simple one.

Unlike 'normal' prisoners they have been arrested and charged under emergency legislation and tried in special non-jury, single-judge

Diplock Courts. (The no-jury Courts were introduced in 1973 on the recommendation of the Diplock Report). Diplock had argued that in cases involving terrorist offences, juries and witnesses were subjected to real and continual intimidation and threats, making it difficult, if not impossible, for the law to be properly carried out. Jury trials for scheduled terrorist offences were therefore abolished. The prisoners claim that the great majority of confessions and statements were extracted from them through the use of illegal methods during their time in custody. It should be noted that section 8 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978, permits the evidence of statements obtained during interrogation, provided that it is established that they have not been obtained by torture, or inhuman or degrading treatment.

Accusations that illegal methods were being used were investigated by Amnesty International. A report published by them in June 1978 concluded, inter alia, that:

'On the basis of the information available to it, Amnesty International believes that maltreatment of suspected terrorists by the RUC has taken place with insufficient frequency to warrant the establishment of a public inquiry to investigate it.'

'The evidence presented to the mission suggests that the machinery for investigating complaints against the police, of assault during interviews is not adequate.'

In response to this, the then Labour Government immediately announced that a Committee of Enquiry was to be set up, under Judge Bennett QC. The terms of reference of the Committee were:

'To examine police procedures and practices in Northern Ireland relating to the interrogation of persons suspected of scheduled offences; to examine the operation of the present procedures for dealing with complaints relating to the conduct of police in the course of the process of interrogation; and to report and make recommendations.'

The Bennett Committee report was published in March 1979. It concluded that:

'Our own examination of medical evidence reveals cases in which injuries, whatever their precise cause were not self-inflicted and were not sustained in police custody.'

The report made a number of recommendations to strengthen the rights of those taken into custody, including an absolute right of access to a solicitor after 48 hours, and the attendance of the parents or guardians of any person under 17 years of age. It also recommended the installation of close-circuit TV, to monitor the activities in the

interrogation rooms. It is understood that **all** of the recommendations have been implemented, although allegations continue to be made that many statements are still extracted under considerable duress. There are, therefore, two interconnected aspects of the prison issue. There is, first, the question of political status and the conditions under which prisoners live in the Maze Prison. Second there are legal procedures by which persons suspected of scheduled terrorist offences are charged and tried.

Our views on **political status** are absolutely clear. We support the policy of treating them like other prisoners which was introduced by the last Labour Government, in 1976. We also agree with the European Commission on Human Rights, which said in June 1980 that it 'is of the opinion, that the right to such a preferential status for certain category of prisoner is not amongst the rights guaranteed by the Convention (on Human Rights) or by Article 9 in particular'. The Commission did, however, express its concern at the inflexible approach of the state authorities 'which has been concerned more to punish offenders against prison discipline, than to explore ways of resolving such a serious deadlock'. Following these observations by the European Commission, a number of privileges, in addition to those already available, were offered to the protesting protestors.

## The five demands

The five demands of the prisoners amount to the right to:

- 1 Wear their own clothes.
- 2 Refrain from prison work.
- 3 Associate freely with one another.
- 4 Organise recreational facilities and have one letter, visit and parcel a week.
- 5 Have lost remission fully restored.

The privileges which are available to conforming prisoners go way beyond what is available to prisoners in Great Britain. In Northern Ireland these privileges consist of the right to:

- 1 Wearing prison issue civilian clothing during working hours — that is, 8.30 am-5.00 pm — and their own clothes for the rest of the evening and at week-ends.

- 2 Pursue industrial employment, vocational training and education as part of the 'useful work' they are expected to carry out.
- 3 Free association within each 25-cell wing each evening for three hours and throughout the day at weekends.
- 4 Seven additional letters per month at the expense of the prison, three extra visits, and a weekly parcel. (Normal prison rules allow one letter and one visit per month.)
- 5 Have lost remission restored. (Remission in Northern Ireland prisons amount to up to **one-half** of the sentences.)

In prisons in Great Britain, it should be noted, prisoners must wear **prison clothes** provided by the authorities. No prisoner is allowed to wear his own clothes at any time. One visit per month, and one letter per week is allowed, with one or two extra letters per week providing the postage is paid for by the prisoner. Subject to good conduct a fixed term prisoner is entitled to **one-third** remission of the sentence.

We are aware that a number of prisoners in the old compound of the Maze Prison retain the special category status which they were granted before 1976, but we believe the original decision to introduce it was wrong, and consequently, we do **not** believe we should return to the kind of prison regime which then existed. We condemn terrorist activity on both sides, and do not support political status. However, we would welcome further improvements in prison conditions, in both Northern Ireland and Great Britain as a whole, such as, the right of all prisoners to wear their own clothes, and free access to newspapers, TV, books, writing materials, etc.

## Diplock Courts

In respect of the Diplock Courts, we do not see any prospect of a return to ordinary trial by jury, so long as paramilitary and terrorist activity continues on the present scale, and witnesses and jury members are subject to intimidation and violence. There is, however, some support for a system of three judges, similar to that in the Republic of Ireland, to replace the single judge courts. We believe this should be given serious consideration. There are, in addition, two extra reforms which could be introduced to improve the present situation. Consideration could be given to repealing the current provisions governing the admissibility of confessions. In our view, statements should only be admissible, if it has been shown that the statutory code of practice has been complied with. The other reform, which was suggested in some of the evidence to the study group, is the introduction of lay assessors alongside the single judge or a reformed three judges system. We are aware that this has already been considered and rejected. Further consideration should,

however, be given to it as a means of introducing an element of public participation.

## 4 THE ECONOMY OF NORTHERN IRELAND

### The problems

The rate of unemployment in Northern Ireland has consistently been well above the average for the United Kingdom as a whole and at almost 19 per cent, is currently among the worst of any region in the EEC. Part of the increase in unemployment can be attributed to the decline in traditional industries such as agriculture, engineering, shipbuilding and textiles. To counter this, there has been an increase in employment in the manufacturing and service sectors, but even this has not been sufficient to provide employment for an expanding labour force. Total employment increased by 8 per cent from 1966-78, but over the same period the labour force expanded, (through natural increase and a higher participation rate, especially of women) by 23 per cent.

In addition to high unemployment, people in Northern Ireland are disadvantaged economically in other ways. Average earnings levels for male manual workers are about 90 per cent of the UK average. A higher proportion of the working population are subject to low pay than in any other UK region, and social security provides a greater proportion of weekly income. When we take account of these factors **and** high unemployment, we find that average disposable income is considerably below the UK average. All this is compounded by two additional factors:

- Northern Ireland is almost totally lacking in indigenous fuel resources. Gas costs the consumer 50 per cent more than in Great Britain, while electricity prices are 25 per cent higher than the UK average.
- A 1979 House Condition Survey showed that some 14 per cent of dwellings in Northern Ireland were statutorily unfit, compared with 4.6 per cent in England in 1976. The percentage of houses in Belfast, for example, without inside WCs and the use of a bath or shower, was more than twice as high as in Liverpool, which is the worst city in England in this respect.

Northern Ireland is very dependent upon the public sector and public expenditure. In 1979-80 public expenditure per head of population at £1,648 was almost £400 more than that in Great Britain. Expenditure per head on health and social services, social security, education, and law and order was higher than in England, Scotland or Wales. In

housing, expenditure was higher than in England and Wales but lower than that in Scotland. Maintaining a high level of expenditure in Northern Ireland is therefore essential if living standards and jobs are to be protected, let alone improved.

The provision of jobs in Great Britain is, of course, a major priority for a Labour Government. In Northern Ireland it is of the utmost importance, particularly in traditionally disadvantaged areas where greater opportunities exist for the men of violence to exploit the frustration of the young unemployed. We do not underestimate the problems involved in the present climate but we fully intend to rise to the challenge. Public bodies such as the Local Enterprise Development Unit and the Northern Ireland Development Agency have been reasonably successful in helping to create jobs over the years, and we will make all the necessary provisions to enable them to continue with their vital task.

### Labour's economic strategy

Our programme for economic expansion and full employment will clearly play a central role in the task of rebuilding the Northern Ireland economy. The key elements of our alternative economic strategy, which is set out in more detail in the NEC statement 'Labour's Plan for Expansion', include:

- **A major reflation** of the economy to increase demand, output and employment through the UK economy.
- **Direct employment creation** through increased public expenditure in Northern Ireland. Particular emphasis will be given to public investment projects in energy conservation, transport, telecommunications and housing.
- **Planning our trade**, using controls on import penetration to sustain expansion and protect vital industries.
- Establishing a **coherent planning framework** for government support and intervention in industry.
- Increasing and directing **investment into manufacturing industry**, by channelling North Sea oil revenues and funds from the financial institutions by **extending public enterprise** and by using new powers over private industry.
- Giving a new focus to **regional policy** with new public enterprise and planning agreements providing the means to steer jobs directly to those parts of the country, including Northern Ireland, which are hardest hit.

- Providing further encouragement of **workers' co-operatives** by providing finance for expansion and new measures to facilitate conversions from conventional companies.
- Increased support for **existing public enterprise**, the easing of rigid cash limits and the encouragement of diversification into new activities.
- New measures to **safeguard jobs** under immediate threat such as temporary employment subsidies.
- **Active manpower policies** to provide skills, as and when they are needed.

## Co-operation with the Republic

In addition to the above, we would seek to improve relations with the Republic of Ireland. We would especially like to see closer and further co-operation in the following areas:

- **Energy** — the restoration of the electricity interconnector between Northern Ireland and the Republic must be seen as an immediate step. This could be part of a wider European electricity system, now that Britain and France are to be linked. A connector between Scotland and Northern Ireland would provide the final link up. There is, in addition, some opportunity for the production of gas either in Northern Ireland or in the Republic of Ireland. A sharing of these resources would be beneficial to Ireland as a whole.
- **Transport** — there is currently considerable co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Republic in transport matters, with Ulsterbus, NI Carriers and NI Railways all having strong links with the south, so that there is joint operation of services and sharing of facilities. The Belfast to Dublin train service is a shared operation. In addition there is an air link between Shannon and Belfast, and a proposed link between Dublin and Derry is about to come into operation.
- **Tourism** — there is close liaison between the relevant tourist authorities and co-operation on subjects such as hotel grading and tourist information services.

Our aim is to build a strong economic and industrial base capable of providing full employment for Northern Ireland's workers. The role of the trade union movement in all this is vital, and we would seek to work closely with it. The trade unions have borne the burden of the problems in recent years with great strength and courage. Their experience and

knowledge will be an important factor in the carrying out of a radical socialist strategy for the Northern Ireland economy. We will ensure that they are fully involved in its implementation.

## LABOUR PARTY ORGANISATION

In recent years a remarkable change has taken place in the attitude of trade unionists in Northern Ireland. In 1977 when a delegation from the last NEC study group held discussions with trade union representatives, there was little or no enthusiasm for a political party capable of speaking on behalf of all Northern Ireland workers. On the most recent visits to Northern Ireland in June 1980 and earlier this year, it was regarded by trade unionists as the single most important issue, next to unemployment.

Two alternatives were put forward by the trade unions for discussions: **either** the Labour Party itself should set up a regional wing of its organisation in Northern Ireland, and open up membership to all and sundry; **or**, the party should initiate a conference in Northern Ireland to which trade unionists and other interested persons would be invited to discuss whether there is a need for a new, separate Labour Party based on the trade unions and, if so, how this could be brought about.

Of the trade unionists we met, there appeared to be a slight majority in favour of the Labour Party extending its organisation to Northern Ireland, but there was also substantial support for a conference to discuss the matter. Very few trade unionists opposed both alternatives. On the other hand, less than half of the evidence from Constituency Labour Parties and party branches (29 out of 68 submissions) had views on party organisation. Of these there was a two to one majority against the extension of the Labour Party to Northern Ireland, or the convening of a conference.

### Labour politics in Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Labour Party, which could at one time claim to attract a measure of catholic and protestant support, is no longer a party of any substance and has little appeal to either community. Its trade union affiliation, although considerable on paper, is no more than tacit. Its support in the community has declined dramatically over the past decade or so. This is reflected in the fact that it currently holds only one seat on the district councils. In the late 1950s and 1960s it had four members in the Stormont Parliament, polling more votes than any other political party with the exception of the Unionist Party. By the early 1970s, with the Provisional IRA campaign in full flight, and the emergence of the Social Democratic and Labour Party, it began to disintegrate. It continues to hope that its fortunes will change and support will pick up again, but in our view there is little prospect of any

substantial improvement and it will remain a party on the periphery of Northern Ireland politics.

Like the NILP, the Social Democratic and Labour Party is a creature of Northern Ireland politics, but unlike the NILP, which was founded in 1924, the SDLP is also a product of the current conflict. It was formed in 1970 by former Nationalist Party, NILP and Republican Labour Party members, including John Hume, Paddy Devlin and Gerry Fitt. It is now widely regarded as a moderate nationalist party with very little support outside of the catholic community, and no trade union affiliation. In the local government elections in May, it lost some ground to the extreme nationalists, but it is still by far the largest party in the minority community. Labour politics in Northern Ireland are thus in a tragic and polarised position. No working class party exists, which is capable of bringing catholics and protestants together inside a single political organisation to further their interests as workers.

### Options for class politics

It is said by those who advocate the extension of our Labour Party to Northern Ireland, that it is likely that Northern Ireland will remain in the United Kingdom for the foreseeable future, and that consequently a Labour Government will for some time be responsible for governing it. This being so, it is argued, the Labour Party should allow workers in Northern Ireland the opportunity of joining and voting for the major working class party in the state in which they live. To prevent the workers of Northern Ireland, the majority of whom belong to British based trade unions, from having an influence within the Party which will govern them, is, it is said, a negation of their democratic rights.

On the other hand, it is argued by those who believe that the Labour Party should initiate a conference of trade unionists in Northern Ireland to consider the setting up of a new mass party of labour, that the extension of the Labour Party's organisation would be a bureaucratic imposition. The actual organisation of a working class party in Northern Ireland should be the responsibility of the workers themselves. The need for a party to unite the working class is believed to be self-evident, and an essential pre-condition for a united Ireland. Such a party, it is suggested, would have fraternal links with both British and Irish Labour Parties.

We have considered both these options very carefully. We recognise the need for a class based party of Labour in Northern Ireland, in order to give a clear political lead on the social and economic issues which unite Catholic and Protestant workers. The formation of such a party, however, must be rooted in the trade unions in Northern Ireland. We therefore believe that interested trade unions in Northern Ireland should support a Conference of trade unions, trade councils, shop stewards committees and other Labour movement organisations in Northern Ireland to discuss whether it is possible to form such a Labour Party.

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